



# EXPLORATIONS

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Number 23

November, 1968

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Note: We have resumed numbering *Explorations*. The original issues, 1953-59, were numbered 1-9. The issues which appeared in *Varsity Graduate* from Summer 1964 to Christmas 1967 were not numbered.

The cost of printing this issue of *Explorations* is being contributed by the Associates of the University of Toronto, Inc., New York, on behalf of the University of Toronto alumni living in the United States.



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## Response to New Media: Robert E. Sisk's "The Movies Try to Talk"

At a time when new media proliferate, it is fascinating to hear the opinions of people confronted with new media even in the recent past. The Sisk essay<sup>1</sup> presented here was released at the same time as the Marx Brothers *Coconuts*. The following words of George Jean Nathan appeared in the same issue of the *American Mercury*:

*Aside from that small portion of the more intelligent public that frequents the moving pictures occasionally in much the same spirit that it occasionally frequents Chinatown, a black-and-tan joint or an evangelical church, that is, out of a feeling of humorous curiosity, the general movie public is of a definite piece with the nickel story paper and dime novel public of thirty or forty years ago.*

When the alphabet was new, Plato cited authorities who were convinced that "this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. . . . They will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing . . ."

When print was new, the menu offered was medieval entirely. Apart from the bubble and flux of medieval romances or comic books, the press was used to disgorge scholastic philosophy in aphoristic forms such as the *Similia* and *Adagia* of Erasmus. *Don Quixote* is the epic of the ensuing strategy of response to the printed word. As much as Thomas More in his *Utopia*, *Don Quixote* made a collage of medieval weaponry and rode off into the distant past in a state of somnambulism. Cervantes saw clearly that the new technology had imprinted the ancient modes on the 16th century, creating the illusion of contemporaneity. This response is embedded in the anecdote about the teacher who asked her class, "What does the 20th century owe to Thomas Edison?" Student: "Without Edison we would be watching television

by candlelight." Karl Marx made the identical blunder when he imagined that Communism lay ahead. The movie "2001" is likewise a rear-view mirror of 19th century hardware in a world of electric software. With Sputnik NATURE ended as a world environment. The evolutionary process shifted to technology itself. We are back at the opening of Genesis II:

*Hitherto the world had only one way of speech, only one language. And now, as men travelled westwards, they found a plain in the land of Sennaar, and made themselves a home there; Here we can make bricks, they said to one another, baked with fire; and they built, not in stone, but in brick, with pitch for their mortar. It would be well, they said, to build ourselves a city, and a tower in it with a top that reaches to heaven; we will make ourselves a great people, instead of scattering over the wide face of earth.*

When radio was new in the 1920's American Negro jazz became a universal language of gesture. Jazz integrated all the cultures of the world for the first time since the Tower of Babel ("jaser" is New Orleans French for "to talk"). The Negro having integrated the world, we now presume to integrate the Negro by hurrying him into a middle-class suburban life. Colour TV is a new language totally unlike black and white TV. It renders the Negro and the Oriental supreme as images.

When the movies were new, they used literature as content. When TV was new, it used movies as content. The laser beam will use human dreams and the audience of the intellect right off the court decks. They will be scrubbed, but good!

1. Robert F. Sisk, "The Movies Try to Talk," *American Mercury*, volume 14, no. 56, August, 1928, pp. 491-495.
2. George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre: The Movie Public," *American Mercury*, volume 14, no. 56, August, 1928, p. 500.



## The Movies Try To Talk

*By Robert F. Sisk*

That art referred to so often as the silent one — motion pictures — seems to be in considerable danger of losing its character. From the time the firm of Warner Brothers first consorted with the Vitaphone device for the synchronization of sound with pictures, the moguls of the industry have paid close and eager attention to the new invention, and now their interest has reached so rabid a point that the major portion of the film business is determined to make its pictures talk. The Warners have already released three films which do this trick — “Tenderloin,” “Glorious Betsy,” and “The Lion and the Mouse.” In the former there is the shriek of a lady about to be attacked. Her cry is, “No, not that!” The first-night audience in New York tittered, but the magnates are undismayed. In the studios of William Fox the talking news-reel has been a regular thing for over a year. Such events as Lindbergh’s take-off on his European flight, with the accompanying noises, have thrilled audiences from coast to coast. Short films, depicting Beatrice Lillie, Raquel Meller, Robert Benchley and other such diverters of the public mind in the act of being dramatic, have been regularly released. All these have been experiments. Now a rush of talking films is on us, and it will be the first stage of a revolution which is going to do either one of two things — remake the movie industry or ruin it.

With almost the unanimity of Pennsylvania Republicans the film boys have agreed to make talking films. Most of them are using the Western Electric Company’s device, the Movietone; a few are to use the Radio Corporation’s, the Photophone. Thus it will be common, before long, to show a movie actor in the thrilling process of audible love-making and we shall hear both the sighs of the lady and the snorts of the gentleman as their passion increases. All this, of course, will be a Great Step Forward.

The reason why the moguls of the films are thus going hot-foot after talking devices is that they need something to fill the great number of vacant

seats in their cinema palaces. These palaces, as everyone knows, exist in all sections of the land, and have, in addition to highly polite, bend-from-the-belly ushers, a great many pews, and hence a pressing need for reliable box-office attractions. Films in themselves, it has been proved, no longer serve to attract the morons in sufficient numbers. Having built all the new theatres to market their own product, the great operators have discovered (or they will before long) that they can't make films on a factory basis and turn out anything capable of bringing in throngs. Only one firm, the United Artists, produces as few as fifteen pictures a year. Mr. Zukor's company, the Paramount, turns out about seventy-five, and believe it or not, some of them aren't so good. The same thing goes for the other big firms, the Metro and the First National. To offset the deficiency in quality and drawing power the Hollywood master-minds have been putting great orchestras into their cathedrals. Also, they have begun digging up singers, dancers, jokesters and that strange anomaly, the master of ceremonies. Some of the more adventurous, such as Roxy, have put a dozen dancers on one bill, and instead of a singer or two, a whole chorus. All of this is based on the accepted movie doctrine that quantity and quality are identical.

So there has grown up what is known as the presentation act in the big film houses. But the presentation acts in themselves are not enough, for meanwhile more and more big theatres have been built. Aided by Wall Street money, the film boys have tried to trump their rivals, until now they all hold plenty of deuces and treys in their hands. Where one great house once drew all the solvent members of the citizenry, two great houses have failed. Towns have become overseated. Mr. Fox, an independent, finding himself without an outlet for his Tom Mix horse operas and his Madge Bellamy pash specials in the major centers of culture, built his own houses. Boy, how he built and bought 'em! When the great Publix theatres were ready to open, they found that the films wouldn't keep them filled. So they too let out a call for stage stars: "Hey, Paul — come on down and play for us!"

Mr. Whiteman, ever willing to oblige, drew \$9,500 weekly for his orchestra. He was billed as being of more importance than the film feature. Sophie Tucker, another eminent star, sang in the picture houses. John Philip Sousa's band played; Gertrude Ederle swam. All of this cost a great deal of money. The picture became subsidiary. A big stage act saved a bad film. Soon

the two became inseparable. Thus the film people played aces all over the short-sighted gentlemen who operated the popular vaudeville theatres. These fellows, secure in their belief that vaudeville, having been born in Boston, would exist forever, were offering their customers Joe Doakes' Dogs while the picture house opposition was setting forth the cream of vaudeville at a lower admission fee than had ever been charged in the vaudeville places. So vaudeville began to starve and the film houses kept on paying almost Prohibition prices for talent.

Then the talking pictures came along.

## II

It was Elder Will H. Hays, fixer for the movie men and, on the side, the leading Presbyterian layman of the United States, who made the dedicatory address when the first Vitaphone show was given. Elder Hays was, at this time, unworried by the insinuations of prying Senators interested in the recent oil mess. Consequently, he was filled with optimism. After predicting that the invention of the talking film would revolutionize the movie business (old Tom Edison had said ten years ago that it could never be perfected), he further mentioned that it would be a godsend to the populace, and sat down. Then an assortment of novelties was unreeled. Vaudevillians did their stuff, jazz orchestras played, and opera singers, including La Talley, offered the high art moments of the evening. It was all quite impressive. The images of the performers were on the screen, and the sounds apparently came from their mouths. Finally came the evening's feature film, Mr. John Barrymore, of the New York Barrymores, in "Don Juan," a somewhat honeyed version. An orchestra arrangement of the score played along with the film — this also on the Vitaphone. There were no union men in the pit; they had been eliminated.

From this beginning two years ago, the talking film worked up to the point where bits of dialogue were introduced. Al Jolson made his appearance in "The Jazz Singer," singing both "Mammy" and the Kol Nidre, beside conversing with his Ghetto Mamma. The celebrated Irving Berlin wept at this première and other hard-hearted gentlemen of Broadway admitted that



Mr. Jolson was never better. The film coined money. At the time it was released, there were but 400 theatres wired with the talking film apparatus. It went into everyone of them and broke record after record. In New York, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Kansas City, and Los Angeles, it entertained the public for week after week. It was followed by the Warner Brothers with a film called "Tenderloin," which wasn't so warm: New York subjected it to certain hoots and jeers at its première. Its spoken dialogue was banal, but when it was released to the outlying districts it began doing even better in some places than "The Jazz Singer." Plainly its chief value as a drawing attraction lay in the fact that it talked. This made up the minds of the film men.

Now nearly everybody in the trade of any importance has announced his intention of making talking films. Paramount will reopen its Long Island studios, and is already making the stage play, "Burlesque," as a talker. The First National is making "Lilac Time." Universal wants to make "Show Boat." The optimists are saying that there will be 1,000 theatres wired for talking films by January 1. The conservatives seem to agree with them. There are between 19,000 and 20,000 film theatres in the United States. Of this great number, it is said that 12,000 are of 600 seats or over, and therefore capable of supporting the talking film. The apparatus necessary to its successful showing costs from \$4,000 to \$20,000 to install.

At the moment the thinkers of the film trade — don't laugh, there are a few! — believe that picture patronage has reached the saturation point. Anything, therefore, which promises to increase it will be received with an acclaim similar to that given successful revolutionists in Guatemala. That this saturation point has actually been reached has been proven several times in the big cities. Let it be assumed, to illustrate, that before a certain big house went up there were four theatres in the locality. After the big house opened, trade dropped at the other theatres. The big house took up the slack, but the total patronage remained the same. Now it is hoped fondly that the talking films will create new business.

As things stand in the average *de luxe* theatre, there are 3,000 seats and five shows daily. This makes a total daily capacity of 15,000. But the boys feel they've had a big day if they play to a total of two and one-half capacity shows, or 7,500 people. Obviously, they are not getting all the possible return



on their investment. So the bankers who have the theatre chains tied up instruct them to inquire into ways and devices for corralling new customers.

### III

The first question which pops into a layman's mind when you mention talking films is whether they will ever supplant the speaking stage. The better people of the speaking stage think they will not be affected. They argue that their audiences are class audiences, composed of people uninterested in anything on the low level of movie entertainment. But the cheapskate producers who have searched and produced stuff fit only for the daughters of stevedores seem ordained to be driven out of business.

There will, of course, be no great weeping and wailing on this account. Most of these men have already worked great harm to what should be a decent institution. They have reckoned art in terms of commerce, and it has resulted in the forfeiture of a safe future for quick gain. Being strictly hit or miss fellows, they stake only small sums on their shows; few of them are plungers worthy of the gallant name. Their fate seems sealed with the successful advent of the talking films, for it is a foregone conclusion that these films will be forced to stick to a low intellectual level — unless their producers wish to alienate the great audience already enrolled under their standards. It would not do to produce "Hamlet" as a talkie and show it five times daily, even though Douglas Fairbanks was the Hamlet and staged a swell wrasslin' match with the Old Man's ghost.

There are others who think that talking films will always be so imperfect as to react in favor of the theatre. There are yet others who think they will not talk as much as people predict. Sime Silverman, editor of the one and only *Variety*, is of the opinion that the basic requirements of the talking films will not differ from those of films of the old order: that story and action will still be of greater importance than dialogue — that the clumpety-clumpety-clump of a thousand horses' hoofs, thundering in the direction of the woe-begone heroine, will be more effective than a pie-faced star sighing and gurgling nothings in the arms of a sappy lover.

This business of making screen ladies say that they love screen gentlemen involves another delicate point. What chance has a cinema favorite, formerly

skilled in the mixing of chocolate syrup with carbonated water, of speaking lines as an actor should? Such work, obviously, will take skilled performers, and they will have to come from the stage. That is where the players of Broadway will go — provided the face isn't too uneven, the jowls too heavy or the paunch too unwieldy to be held in by corsets. Salaries in the films are fabulous. An actor of the legitimate stage, musical comedy excepted, may make \$1,000 a week, but that is about the top. In the movies \$1,000 salaries are fairly common: that is what ex-chorus men get for playing second parts. For the featured man \$3,000 is an average wage, and so expert a horseman as Mr. Mix receives from his new employers, FBO, the sum of \$540,000 annually. The stage cannot possibly compete. Nor will it. Rather it will have to buckle down to the thankless task of developing new players for itself, putting them under long term contracts, and then losing them to the films when they become of any real skill and value. But there are a few actors and directors with consciences. There are some stage people — believe it or not — who'd rather play in relatively sensible stuff for \$1,000 weekly than in Glynish bilge for \$7,500.

Moreover, when the film producers, who are as incompetent a bunch as you will find anywhere, begin to make talking films it may dawn upon them that the trick is difficult to turn. The average film director may not be able to do it. Gentlemen skilled in making battleships ram fruit steamers so that tarantulas may escape and bite admirals on the leg will be faced with the difficulty of maintaining dramatic pace; they will have to fit their scenes so that action is heightened where it should be, so that the rising inflection in the dialogue will continue to rise throughout several scenes, although they be made at different times. All of this will probably make some of the star boys go back to their kennels and gnaw discontentedly on the accumulated bones.

There aren't a dozen good directors on the legitimate stage. Some of the stuff turned out by the incompetents around New York is, even to a casual observer, punk. Even the good directors miss fire occasionally — they're so fond of trying new forms and styles. In the main, all the good directors are well known, but the bad ones seem to have escaped being exiled, so great has been the need for both good and bad. This new movie situation will bring out the talent and separate the quick from the dead. There will be plenty of suffering before the perfected talking film comes along.

## IV

Only a fool would deny that the new device will be enormously effective in many instances. Take a typical Western film. Let the cowboy be petting his horse. As his hand passes over the animal's nose the horse will, in all likelihood, whinny. Through the theatre will go a thousand feminine "ahs". Let Mr. Mix be in pursuit of desperate villains. The report of his revolver will be a kick, and it will be accompanied by the sound of his running horse. Let the villains be shooting at him. Each passing bullet will give forth a sharp squeal. And let his horse rear and snort; all of this, too, will be recorded. Then let the hero greet his cowgirl:

"Little gal, I ain't no city feller and I ain't no fancy lover, but I love you, gal, I love you. Won't you marry me, gal? Aw, come on, gal, an' marry me!"

If too much dialogue isn't used, the climactic portions will be highly effective. An instance of this was recently provided by a filmed story of Betsy Patterson, the Baltimore lady who married Jerome Bonaparte. In this film, "Glorious Betsy," the Vitaphone device was used, and by the action of the story it was necessary for an aide of Jerome to announce him to guests at a reception.

Andre de Segurola was playing the aide. His voice is deep, rich and round. Moreover, he is a Frenchman able to speak English and enough of a showman to pinch his accents neatly. Consequently, when he broke into the silence of the film with his announcement, the effect was corking:

"Ladeeeeeeeez and genteelman, eet is my honaire and preveleeege to announce ze envoooy extraaaaaad'nary from his Highness, ze Emperor of France, Jeeeeerome Bonaparte!"

In contrast to the pallid organ of Dolores Costello, who also played in the film, de Segurola's voice was magnificent. It brought out, to some small degree, the possibilities of the whole thing. The search, therefore, will be after voices coupled with faces.

A commercial problem arises here. The industry now receives about 40% of its total income from its foreign sales. Except for the English-speaking countries, the talking films will be no good. A black-and-white film will, of course, be taken at the same time the talking film is being recorded, but with the induction of new players to Hollywood to make the talkies, their installa-



tion as favorites to succeed the speechless and therefore fallen gods will be costly. For every non-talking favorite omitted, a talking player will have to be substituted, and inasmuch as some of the present day stars have built up terrific followings abroad, it will be difficult to talk their admirers into accepting other players suitable for both the black and white and the talking versions. This same problem will be encountered at home, for talking pictures will not be played in the so-called shooting-galleries. If these places continue to exist, they will have to be supplied with ordinary films, and the same situation which applies to star followings abroad applies with equal force here.

The First National has already announced that it will maintain a School of Elocution to teach its players how to talk. . . . Paramount plans an 8,000-seat theatre in Times Square to display its talking films. . . . And the relatives on the payrolls of all the big firms are wondering whether competent men will supplant them.

MARSHALL MCLUHAN

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## Why “pluck” is the most important word in Shakespeare

### 1

Shakespeare's English histories, exclusive of *King John* and *Henry 8*, form a series of eight plays starting with *Richard 2* and ending with *Richard 3*, but these eight plays are grouped into an earlier tetralogy consisting of *1 Henry 6*, *2 Henry 6*, *3 Henry 6* and *Richard 3* and a later tetralogy consisting of *Richard 2*, *1 Henry 4*, *2 Henry 4*, and *Henry 5*. The spirit of Henry the fifth pervades the first, earlier tetralogy. The murder of Richard the second haunts the later tetralogy. Undoubtedly there is a causal relation between the remembered glory of the hero of Agincourt and the fate of the medieval king Richard. The outstanding novelty of these two tetralogies consists in their use of historical environments to explore contemporary consciousness. What energizes this exploration is a new syntax, a syntax which depends on the tactuality of words. What Shakespeare learned to do in the history plays was to put words together in structures which relied merely upon verbal cohesiveness. Doing so, he found out he had access to a principle of dramatic organization as well as to an instrument of discovery.

How he made use of it — I have elsewhere called this syntax genetic wordplay — will become clear if we consider the problems imposed by his cyclical design in the English histories. The first three Henry the sixth plays require the backing of *Henry 5*. *Richard 3* depends upon the backing of the first three Henry the sixth plays, unless we dismiss it as merely an exercise in melodrama. Behind *Henry 5*, as well as behind *1 Henry 4* and *2 Henry 4*, if these plays are to be fully comprehensible, there must be erected the tragic design of the overthrow of authority in *Richard 2*. Shakespeare's cycle of history plays then is not satisfactory if only because none of these plays realizes by itself what it could have achieved in the way of exploration if the full weight of the seven other plays could have been brought to bear on it.

What Shakespeare could do to save his cyclical experiment he did — that is to say, he interconnected the eight plays by supplying them with what might be compared to a common nervous system. If this linkage by means of genetic wordplay wasn't completely successful, it was still promising enough to be employed again in the great tragedies, as well as in problem plays like *Measure for Measure* and in his greatest non-dramatic work, the *Sonnets*.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries referred to genetic wordplay as a run on words — Polonius for example uses the term in *Hamlet*.

OPHELIA     *He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders  
Of his affection to me.*

POLONIUS   *Affection? Pooh! You speak like a green girl  
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.  
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?*

OPHELIA     *I do not know, my lord, what I should think.*

POLONIUS   *Marry, I will teach you! Think yourself a baby  
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,  
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,  
Or (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,  
Running it thus) you'll tender me a fool.*

The phrase genetic wordplay however seems useful because it does indicate the way in which this sort of syntactical treatment breeds other words, as here the word "tenders" breeds green, unsifted, baby, true pay, sterling (just as "ecstasy", the key genetic pun word in *Hamlet*, breeds "tenders".)

Lancelot Andrewes, whose crumbling style absolutely necessitated genetic wordplay as a means of cohesion, declares in *A Sermon Preached Before The Kings Majestie, at White-hall, on Wednesday, the XXV of December, A.D. MDCXXII*, "The Text is of a starr; and we may make all runn on a starr. . . ." In the eight-play history cycle the chief genetic pun word is "pluck"; and certainly Shakespeare in these plays makes "all runn" on the



word “pluck”. It was an inspired choice, for the word “pluck” has rich possibilities as a genetic pun word. It is a theologian’s word, since it takes us back to the plucking of the apple in *Genesis*. It is a thief’s, a robber’s, or a burglar’s word at least in the sense of steal. It is a pornographer’s word since it fragments both nature and the human body in the phrase “pluck her rose”. It is a poulterer’s word, since it refers to the denudification of the domestic fowl by de-feathering. It is also by extension from the chickenyard to the classroom a schoolmaster’s word meaning fail. It can mean guts, stomach, bowels, heart, and so courage or bravery. How resonant the word in its various uses can become may be seen by consulting the biblical phrases in which it occurs — *Cruden’s Concordance* for example lists the following.

- Nu. 33.52.     *Then ye shall . . . quite pluck down their high places. . . .*
- Deu. 23.25.     *When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbours, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.*
- Ps. 25.15.     *Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.*
- 80.12           *Why hast thou broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?*
- Ecc. 3.2.        *A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.*
- Je. 12.14       *Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them.*
- .17.            *But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord.*
- 22.24.         *As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence. . . .*
- 24.6            *. . . I will build them, and not pull them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up.*

- 31.28 . . . *I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so I will watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord.*
- 45.4 . . . *that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land.*
- Eze. 17.9 . . . *Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruits thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots. . . .*
- Mi. 3.2. *Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from them, and their flesh from their bones. . . .*
- Mat. 5.20 *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. . . .*
- John 10.28 . . . *they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*
29. . . . *no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*

Finally, we should remember that, like the word brandish, the word pluck is an actor's word, for it can be mimed.

### 3

Few critics have expressed enthusiasm for Shakespeare's three Henry VI plays and there has been little attempt to take these three plays seriously as explorations of Elizabethan consciousness. If we follow the paronomasia on "pluck" through these three plays and into the fourth and culminating play of the early tetralogy, we discover that Shakespeare links together a series of attempts to re-incarnate the spirit of Henry V. That this spirit is an evil force, is suggested by the heavy irony of the opening speeches of *1 Henry 6*.

BEDFORD *Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!  
Comets importing change of times and states  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars  
That have consented unto Henry's death. . . !*

- GLOUCESTER *England ne'er had a king until his time.  
Virtue he had, deserving to command.  
His brandished sword did blind men with his beams.  
His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings;  
His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,  
More dazzled and drove back his enemies  
Than midday sun fierce bent against their faces. . . .  
He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.*
- EXETER *We mourn in black. Why mourn we not in blood. . . ?*
- WINCHESTER *He was a king blessed of the King of Kings.  
Unto the French the dreadful judgement-day  
So dreadful will not be as was his sight.  
The battles of the Lord of hosts he fought.  
The church's prayers made him so prosperous.*

As we shall see, Bedford's line to follow shortly is a crucial clue to the whole play, and, as a matter of fact, to the entire early tetralogy:

*Henry the fifth, thy ghost I invoke.*

The entire tetralogy is structured by an imitation of this line and in addition the word "invoke" is a direct derivative of the genetic pun word pluck. Let us leave until later on in the discussion what I have just observed about the construction of the entire early tetralogy as mimesis, and pay attention to the paronomasia on "pluck" as it occurs in these opening lines of *1 Henry 6*.

As yet the word "pluck" has not been used. When it is first used it comes in on an off-beat. But even when we consider the Temple garden scene in Act Two of this play — the celebrated fourth scene in which the heirs of Plantagenet blood divide, as they pluck white roses and red roses to distinguish their division into Yorkists and Lancastrians — we cannot be absolutely certain about more than the possibility of paronomasia in the opening scene. In this respect the paronomasia in the history cycle is less effective in the theatre than the paronomasia on the word "nothing" in *King Lear*, after Cordelia's first use of the word. The first use of the word "pluck" in Shakespeare's history cycle occurs in the messenger's speech about the



overthrow of Talbot. Talbot before his overthrow, the messenger tells us, was caught unawares and

*. . . wanted pikes to set before his archers;  
Instead whereof sharp stakes plucked out of hedges  
They pitched in the ground confusedly,  
To keep the horsemen off from breaking in.*

Talbot seems to be the answer to Bedford's prayer for the return of Henry V.

*Hundreds he sent to hell, and none durst stand him;  
Here, there and everywhere, enraged he slew.  
The French exclaimed, the devil was in arms. . . .*

But the messenger's reference to "pluck" (sharp stakes plucked out of hedges) exerts little force until the entire cycle from Richard II to Richard III is complete, until the annointed king, Richard II ("the figure of God's majesty, / His captain, steward, deputy-elect, / Annointed, crowned, planted many years") has been "plucked headlong from the usurpéd throne", and until, following the theft of Richard's crown by Bolingbroke / Henry IV, the mock-thief or petty-thief Falstaff, with his enormous pluck or guts has become the plucked, Xenophon-like schoolmaster of Prince Hal, who is no Cyrus, but the son of a king who must be understood as antichrist's lieutenant.

If we ask what was the audience-appeal of *1 Henry 6*, a plausible answer is that Shakespeare in this play is an almost compulsive analyst of contemporary consciousness. We can prove this answer to be more than plausible by considering the contemporary relevance of Act II, sc: 4, the famous plucking-of-the-red-and-white-roses scene. What takes place in the Temple garden is an iconic treatment of division. The pun on "pluck" is wrenched to mean "plucking apart", and rendered with full emphasis on theatre values. Only a little reflection is needed to understand this scene as in itself a metaphor on Elizabethan fragmentation. The word "pluck" is used nine times in this scene, and five times in five successive speeches spoken at the onset of dissension. The sexual overtones of the plucking of roses are obvious, and appropriate enough as comment on the Wars of the Roses, a woman's war. The names of the disputants are part of the paronomasia.

PLANTAGENET . . . *From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.*

SOMERSET *Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,  
But dare maintain the party of the truth,  
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.*

WARWICK *I love no colours, and without all colour  
Of base insinuating flattery  
I pluck this white rose with Plantagenet.*

SUFFOLK *I pluck this red rose with young Somerset,  
And say withal I think he held the right.*

VERNON *Stay, lords and gentlemen, and pluck no more  
Till you conclude that he, upon whose side  
The fewest roses are cropped from the tree,  
Shall yield the other in the right opinion.*

As Suffolk agrees, Vernon's point is well objected, especially when italicized by his speech ("I pluck this pale and maiden blossom") a moment later. For the stripped bush is to indicate the successful disputant — an iconic stroke of Shakespearean deadliness, since what is enacted is a literal defloration which labels the enactors rapists, though it is only at long last when we are in possession of the total cycle that we can grasp why the rape perpetrated is the rape of England and why this is sequel and result of Henry V's rape of France.

Actually the paronomasia on pluck has been growing as the play develops with furious slowness through the first act. The first word of the play "Hung" (in "Hung be the heavens with black, etc") is a punword, for to hang is an inversion of to pluck. Brandish, scourge and revolting (keywords of old Bedford's first speech) are of the paronomasia — revolt, because to revolt is to pluck down. The imagined eyes of the defunct Henry V are supposed to be "replete with wrathful fire" — and fire is a punword derived from pluck via bowels and heart via courage (the courageous man is a man of fire?) But it would be tedious to follow this paronomasia term by term, so relentlessly does Shakespeare play at the game of ambiguities and word linkages.

## 4

Throughout the entire first tetralogy, the paronomasia on pluck actuates a structure which is organized by imitation of Bedford's line, "Henry the fifth, thy ghost I invoke." Let us now consider how this mimesis operates.

The word "invoke" belongs to the syntax established by the pun on pluck. But the whole concept of plucking up (possibly out of hell) Henry V's ghost is itself a pattern which is imitated as an entire pattern. The pluck syntax extends through the whole cycle. The other pattern — of ghost-raising — culminates in *Richard 3*. It is not continued in the second tetralogy.

Within *1 Henry 6* it develops the main characterizations, Talbot, Joan la pucelle, Burgundy, Suffolk and Margaret. Talbot from the beginning seems like an answer to Bedford's prayer. Talbot's fatal French opposite, Joan la pucelle can be thought of as an inverse imitation of the same invocation, a complex characterization we must examine carefully as possibly Shakespeare's first significant character role. Burgundy imitates Bedford's conjuration of Henry's ghost by appearing as a spirit of treason, and Suffolk does so as a spirit of division. Burgundy's betrayal comes about by his answering Joan's entreaty that he join the French cause. Suffolk plots with Margaret to marry her to Henry VI with the intention of controlling England through this French woman — his is the last word of this first play.

SUFFOLK    *Thus Suffolk has prevailed. . . .*  
                  *Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King;*  
                  *But I will rule both her, the King and realm.*

The irony here is obvious enough despite the distances between its terms: Bolingbroke's policy of pacifying England by war in France has at long last brought about armed conflict in England largely under the inspiration of a fierce Frenchwoman. But this irony takes us beyond the limits of the first Henry VI play. The main conflict in *1 Henry 6* rages between Joan la pucelle who to the English appears as a witch and Talbot who to the French seems like a devil.

The way in which Joan's characterization imitates Bedford's invocation of Henry V's ghost must be discussed further. Shakespeare shows us Joan, as she thought of herself.



PUCELLE     *Dauphin, I am by birth a shepherd's daughter,  
My wit untrained in any kind of art.  
Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleased  
To shine on my contemptible estate.  
Lo, whilst I waited on my tender lambs,  
And to sun's parching heat displayed my cheeks,  
God's mother deigné to appear to me,  
And in a vision full of majesty  
Willed me to leave my base vocation,  
And free my country from calamity:  
Her aid she promised and assured success. . . .*

Next we see La Pucelle as a fallible adviser to Charles the Dauphin, when the re-invigourated French suffer reverses.

*Improvudent soldiers! had your watch been good,  
This sudden mischief never could have fall'n.*

We see her as a successful guerilla leader before Rouen, her head and those of her soldiers covered with sacks, as disguises. We see her pleading with Burgundy and trying her eloquence to bring him back into the French fold.

*See, see, thou fight'st against thy countrymen. . . .  
Come, come, return! Return, thou wandering lord:  
Charles and the rest will take thee in their arms.*

We see her trying unsuccessfully to gain aid from evil spirits, and despairing when the fiends she has invoked “walk and speak not”, “hang their heads”, “shake their heads” and “depart.” Her *cri de coeur* is both intensely human and heavily loaded with irony.

*See, they forsake me! Now the time is come  
That France must vail her lofty-pluméd crest,  
And let her head fall into England's lap.  
My ancient incantations are too weak,  
And hell too strong for me to buckle with.  
Now France, thy glory droopeth to the dust.*

And finally we see her persecuted by brutal English captors and trying to save herself from “faggots,” “barrels of pitch” and the “fatal stake” by claiming to be with child.

On the principle that an electrical current induces a current in a counter direction, Joan may be likened to a counter-force induced by Henry V. She is not, I think we can agree, God’s instrument to punish the English, as Professor Tillyard supposes her to be. It is perhaps Shakespeare’s vice to over-complicate things, but he is not simple-minded. Such naive Hegelianism is foreign to his thought. In Shakespeare antithesis leads, not to synthesis, but fragments into further breeding of antitheses. The seeming synthesis brought about, at the end of *Richard 3*, by union of Richmond and Elizabeth (“The true succeders of each royal house”) decides nothing — the concluding couplet spoken by Richmond about his own victory (“Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again: / That she may long live here, God say Amen!”) is mere pious wish and a Tudor one. The sequel is the very fragmentation of consciousness which Shakespeare explores in the history cycle and in the later tragedies. So Joan la pucelle must be understood as an analysis of the way in which evil opposed by evil breeds evil.

She is intended to be an evil force invoked willy-nilly by Bedford when he (mistakenly) invokes Henry V’s ghost. At first, like Henry she is cloaked in religiosity. Like Henry, she is brave and single-minded. She is extremely shrewd as a practical soldier. She is eloquent. Unlike Henry, she fails. Her patriotism and lust for personal glory drive her into seeking diabolical aid. She even becomes via her invoked demons a prophet, for when she says that France must fall into England’s lap, she seems to be foretelling the rise of Margaret, for she is no sooner taken than Suffolk captures Margaret and Margaret captivates Suffolk. Since Shakespeare thinks of La pucelle as France’s saint, we can gauge by her what he thought of England’s hero, King Henry V.

## 5

We can discuss the paronomasia on pluck as a syntaxing of meanings. It also has a shape, the shape of a core of meanings which grow in all directions, dividing and subdividing, until its filaments extend like nerves into

every speech of the history cycle and we reach textures where we cannot be sure whether individual terms are part of the paronomasia or not. (For example, consider King Edward's phrase at the very end of *3 Henry 6*, "Farewell *sour* annoy!" — which is part of the rhymed couplet which ends the play. Sour links with fruit which is plucked — Edward has indeed plucked the crown from Henry VI. But is the last phrase of this couplet, "lasting joy", part of the pun?) The shape of the paronomasia is part of the meaning of the work, and a very important part. In brief, the paronomasia on pluck is an iconic statement of the main insight, and a most characteristically Shakespearean one, that evil breeds and the nature of evil is its growth by division. Talbot answers Henry V, Joan la pucelle replies to Talbot, Suffolk by making Margaret his mistress and Henry VI's queen answers Joan; while in the meantime Lancaster has plucked a red rose to answer the white rose plucked by York. At the end of *2 Henry 6* York as a term of division declares: "From Ireland this comes York to claim his right, / And pluck the crown from feeble Henry's head." At the beginning of *3 Henry 6*, Warwick says of York, "I'll plant Plantagenet, root him up who dares." Clifford, Northumberland, Westmoreland, and Exeter all oppose Warwick. Westmoreland is assigned the key pun word: "Let's pluck him down", he says of the newly proclaimed King Edward. Warwick in this scene gets one of the principal pluck core words, *usurp*. Exeter accuses Warwick of being a traitor, and Warwick replies,

*Exeter, thou are a traitor to the crown,  
In following this usurping Henry.*

Later on in Act II Warwick boasts that he can "pluck the diadem from faint Henry's head." But at the end *3 Henry 6* (after Edward has compromised Warwick's embassy to King Lewis of France in order to seek the French king's fair sister's hand for his king-protégé, and after that fickle amorous king-protégé has married his pleasing widow, the Lady Grey) Warwick turns against Edward and demands of him, "confess who set thee up and plucked thee down." At long last Edward prevails over Warwick, and Warwick thinks of himself, at his death, as yielding "the cedar to the axe's edge." Here we follow the coreword pluck to the "hand" that does the plucking to the "axe"; and then, in reference to Margaret's forces, to the pick-axe or



mattock — these forces, we are told, “must by the roots be hewn up.” Edward’s joy in seizing the crown at the end of *3 Henry 6* and his hope of healing the broken and divided England, are delusive, for in the next play, *Richard 3*, Edward dies a lonely death and leaves his queen to mourn that “death has snatched my husband from my arms, / And plucked two crutches from my feeble hand, / Clarence and Edward . . .” — both murdered by the monster Richard of Gloucester. Neither the process of evil nor the genetic word play on pluck which traces it out come to an end. With *Richard 3* completed, Shakespeare breaks the cycle. He begins the next tetralogy with *Richard 2*. It isn’t implausible to suppose that one motive behind the writing of the second tetralogy was a clarification of the tangled strands of the first tetralogy.

## 6

We have referred to these two tetralogies as earlier and later with the order of composition in mind. But we may also designate them otherwise — for example, as modern and medieval, with respect to the contact made with the Tudor age and the age of Chaucer; or as experimental and analytical, according to the nature of the exploration undertaken. What I mean by this last designation is that the earlier, *Henry 6 / Richard 3*, tetralogy consists of an experimental exploration of an Elizabethan wasteland projected imaginatively and metaphorically in terms of the Wars of the Roses. The second, later, maturer tetralogy undertakes an analysis of this relatively inchoate experiment. Both groups of plays tackle the Elizabethan problem as Shakespeare senses it, but the second group deals with both the problem and the earlier attempt to find terms for it. Shakespeare’s stance is not dissimilar from that of those many contemporary analysts of the modern mind, writers such as Ortega y Gasset, Sartre, Hannah Arendt, or, especially, Marshall McLuhan.

In brief, moving back from *Richard 3*, which touches Tudor England, we trace the roots of a continuing secularization. In *Richard 2*, with its point of departure in the medieval period, we see this secularization as a desacralization which occurs when Richard II is deposed. It is indeed possible to read the deposition of King Richard as a metaphor of desacralization. John Donne as we know found a different metaphor for the same

process, the “untimely death of Mistris ELIZABETH DRURY”, and declares that because of that death the

*new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and the'earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to looke for it.  
And freely men confesse that this world's spent,  
When in the Planets, and the Firmament  
They seeke so many new; they see that this  
Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.  
'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;  
All just supply, and all Relation:  
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,  
For every man thinkes he hath got  
To be a Phoenix. . . .*

Donne sees the condition of secularization / desacralization as a state where all men think of themselves as Phoenixes. Shakespeare sees this condition as a ruined England where every man is a usurping king, and as such a model for those who wish to dethrone him.

## 7

Proceeding to a new level of analysis in *Richard 2*, Shakespeare doesn't abandon the genetic wordplay on pluck. Instead, he uses it with enormously increased skill. It could be doubted whether the paronomasia in the early tetralogy could be deciphered without the help of the clear paradigm of *Richard 2*. Anyone can master the main outlines of the genetic pun in *Richard 2* by simply underlining the occurrences of the word pluck, plucking, plucked, etc. As soon as one looks for the development of this core word, its inversions such as plant and its variants such as crop, cut off the heads of, root away, depose, deposing, usurp, violate, spill, spilled, etc. protrude almost unmistakably. Shakespeare takes care to italicize even way-out variants, such as tongue. Thus Mowbray under sentence of exile complains “. . . My native English, now I must forgo, / And now my tongue's use is to me no more / Than an unstringed viol or a harp. . . .” and a little later

on in the play Northumberland speaking of the dead Gaunt declares of the dead man "His tongue is now a stringless instrument. . . ." Shakespeare takes us via tongue strings to musical instruments which are plucked and so to the core word pluck. This is a mere detail, but it makes an important link between plucking and mocking — in mocking we pluck at somebody's image by means of the tongue. Similarly, it makes a link between pluck and honour or rumour, as this tactual syntax links the "plume-pluck'd" Richard and Falstaff and the allegorical chorus who gets *2 Henry 4* going.

*Richard 2* begins with a tongue battle, in which the impassioned Bolingbroke and Mowbray try to pluck each other down. Bolingbroke's accusation is clearly a plucking at Mowbray's integrity, and perhaps a plucking at Richard himself, since the king warns him, through Mowbray, of the royal function, "lions make leopards tame." The punishment that Richard II deals out unequally to appellant and counter-appellant introduces the word exile as an inversion of plant or root which are inversions of pluck — the exile is the uprooted man. But the punishment of exile also introduces the first use in this play of the word pluck. In the banishing of Bolingbroke, Richard II sees himself as plucking away from the aged, dying Gaunt his first fruit, his son and heir. "Uncle," says King Richard to old Gaunt, "I see thy grieved heart. Thy sad aspect / Hath from the number of his (*i.e.*, Bolingbroke's) banished years / Pluck'd four away." Gaunt dies, and when after his death King Richard proposes to forfeit the exiled Bolingbroke's inheritance, York, Richard's uncle, denounces this act as most unjust, he says "You pluck a thousand dangers on your head, / You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts." King Richard does forfeit Bolingbroke's inheritance, and he does jeopardize his crown, as York prophesied. Northumberland, speaking in favour of the proposed invasion by the exiled Bolingbroke, uses an extremely revealing variant of pluck when he says that the rebels must "Imp out our drooping country's wing, / Redeem from broking pawn the blemish'd crown." Imp is a falconer's term meaning to engraft wing feathers, and here is an inversion of pluck in the sense of defeather. But also by balancing imp and redeem, Shakespeare establishes the link between pluck and redeem. Redeem can be thought of as a plucking oneself or someone back from a delivered judgment. The yoking of imp and redeem touches one of the main ironies of the play, for Christian teaching links plucking the apple



and redemption, and the speaker here is urging his co-rebels to pluck down the Lord's annointed King Richard in order to redeem England.

Critics who stress *Richard 2* as a study of kingly weakness and failure risk missing the true nature of the climax of the play, which in fact is managed as in Greek tragedy, off stage. It is not so much that Richard is weak, as that the forces lined up against him are enormously and peculiarly strong. At the beginning of the play Bolingbroke shows his hand, as he gestures against Mowbray — clutching his sword (“What my tongue speaks my right drawn sword may prove”) — hurling down his glove as a challenge (“Pale trembling coward, there I throw my gage”) — threatening (“This arm shall do it, or this life be spent”.) At the very end of the play, we see Bolingbroke as Henry IV after the murder of Richard haunted by what his hand has done: “I’ll make,” he says with a blindness that is patently Machiavellian, “a voyage to the Holy Land, / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.” We do not see that guilty hand as it despoils Richard’s crown. There is perhaps one exception to this observation, namely Bolingbroke’s proceedings against Bushy and his accomplices, whom Bolingbroke calls “The caterpillars of the commonwealth, / Which I have sworn,” he adds, “to weed and pluck away.” Bushy and Greene are sent to summary execution, but given a brief mock trial, “to wash,” Bolingbroke informs them, “your blood from off my hands.” But this exception in which to some extent Bolingbroke acknowledges his hand, only reinforces the secrecy with which he encloses Richard in a grasp of inexorable steel. Richard himself complains of this hidden hand of Bolingbroke, and observes that when

*the searching eye of heaven is laid  
Behind the globe and lights the lower world,  
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen  
In murthers and in outrage boldly here;  
But when from under this terrestrial ball  
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines,  
And darts his light through every guilty hole,  
Then murthers, treasons, and detested sins,  
The cloak of night being pluck'd from off their backs,  
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves;*

*So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,  
 Who all this while hath revell'd in the night . . .  
 Shall see us rising in our throne the east,  
 His treasons will sit blushing in his face,  
 Not able to endure the sight of day,  
 But self-affrighted tremble at his sin.*

In the same speech Richard recognizes that Bolingbroke's hand is composed of "every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd / To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown. . . ." Moreover, when Northumberland comes to Flint Castle in Wales to order the defeated Richard to the Tower of London, usurpation has occurred, Richard has *de facto* been deposed and Northumberland refers to Bolingbroke's royalty of blood. Richard asks whether he is lawful king or not. "If we be not," he demands, "show us the hand of God / That hath dismissed us from our stewardship; / For well," he adds, "we know no hand of blood and bone, / Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre, / Unless he do profane, steal or usurp." The hand that protects Northumberland as he insults Richard is the military power of Bolingbroke, and it is this hand not the hand of God that knocks Richard down. This is obvious, but the obvious is underlined by the Bishop of Carlisle's speech,

*. . . shall the figure of God's majesty,  
 His captain, steward, deputy elect,  
 Anointed, crowned, planted so many years,  
 Be judged by subject and inferior breath,  
 And he himself not present?*

Carlisle ends his denunciation of Bolingbroke as a traitor with a prophecy of what will happen if Bolingbroke is crowned — a prophecy which is borne out in the plays which deal with the reigns that follow, Bolingbroke's as Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Richard III.

*Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny  
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd  
 The field of Golgotha, and dead men's skulls —  
 O, if you raise this house against this house,  
 It will the woefullest division prove  
 That ever fell upon this cursed earth.*

Carlisle describes a waste land, and it is this waste land that Shakespeare explores at length in the history cycle: "the abomination of desolation" under antichrist (*Mark* 13:14).

Those readers who suppose that Shakespeare intends to show Richard as abdicating his kingship miss the web of meanings of the rigorous and by no means obscure pun on pluck. Richard's crown is plucked from him. York's speech, "Great Lancaster, I come to thee / From plume-pluck'd Richard", proves this, even as he asserts that Richard "Adopts (Bolingbroke) heir, and his high sceptre yields / To the possession of (Bolingbroke's) royal hand." At this point, the all-important moment in the pluck-syntax, when York announces to Bolingbroke that Richard is plucked, the question is not about the meaning of pluck (because all the meanings of the genetic pun energize the word), but about *when* the event takes place. York says it has happened, and his excitement shows that it has just happened. He refers to Bolingbroke as *de facto* king. He looks forward to the coronation as an inevitable event and hails Bolingbroke as Henry the Fourth. Bolingbroke makes a "prepared" statement, "In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne." This blasphemous piece of cynicism provokes Carlisle to make his great prophetic denunciation of the plucking — and if we are to interpret Shakespeare by Holinshed, here Shakespeare distorts historical record to his purposes. Carlisle seems to be referring to the proposed trial of Richard, as in Holinshed. He is in fact referring to the deposition, the plucking. He is immediately suppressed, for treason. Why then does Shakespeare make York refer to Bolingbroke, just before hailing him as the new king, as "Great Duke of Lancaster"? The answer is plain. Shakespeare wants to make the act of plucking that of powerful treason. We can only interpret "plume-pluck'd" as an intensive of pluck'd. Richard is totally plucked, stripped. It is not outward feathers that have been pulled, but the furniture of his soul, for, York tells Bolingbroke, "plume-pluck'd Richard . . . with willing soul / Adopts thee heir." What has happened has been concentration-camp stuff, and what is to occur in the resignation scene to follow is concentration-camp stuff, if we wish to substitute a twentieth-century symbol for an Elizabethan one, the feudal tower, to which both Bolingbroke and Milton's Satan compare themselves or are compared. To refer to Aesop's fable of the crow with borrowed plumes is to trivialize the key moment in the entire



history cycle. Here we are made aware of what the ubiquitous hand of Bolingbroke has done, and also see, for a moment, York, who turns the kingdom over to that hand, as a personification of that hand.

The so-called resignation scene then displays not a weakling Richard who sentimentalizes his failure, but an all-powerful Bolingbroke playing with his victim. But the victim though broken by the "plucking" he has received, still hasn't been broken enough to enable his destroyers to claim that he has resigned his crown of his own good will. Even Holinshed writing of the historical Richard makes it clear that the instrument of abdication has been imposed by brute force. Holinshed writes that

*. . . the king being now in the hands of his enimies,  
and utterlie despairing of all comfort, was easilie persuaded  
to renounce his crowne and princelie preheminnence, so that in  
hope of life onelie, he agreed to all things that were of him  
demanded.*

The irony of Holinshed's next sentence must have made Shakespeare shudder, as it does us.

*And so (as it should seeme by the copie of an instrument  
hereafter following) he renounced and voluntarilie was deposed  
from his roiall crowne and kinglie dignitie. . . .*

Every sign Shakespeare's Richard gives of a true abdication compromises those who have compelled the act. Richard's first remark when brought in before the deponents is, "Alack, why am I sent for to a king. . . . ?" York says to the victim, "To do that office of thine own good will / Which tired majesty did make thee offer, / The resignation of thy state and crown / To Henry Bolingbroke." The victim cries out, "Here, cousin, seize the crown." Bolingbroke observes smoothly, "I thought you had been willing to resign." The victim declares that he is still king of his griefs. When Bolingbroke persists, "Are you contented to resign the crown?", the victim observes that he cannot, for he will then be nothing; and as he resigns his sceptre, etc. he will become a nothing who can only say, "God save King Henry, unking'd Richard says." That is to say, Richard recognizes in the Bolingbroke who has unkinged him, a king who is a model for all treasonous-minded

subjects. What is rigorously emphasized, is Bolingbroke's arch-theft, and the pluck-syntax, as it negotiates this emphasis in almost all the key-phrases and iconic expressions in this scene, keeps "plume-pluck'd" Richard before us as the wilful, unwavering index of this arch-theft. It is Richard who calls his accusers Judas's (Judas plucked Christ with a kiss?) Richard compares the crown to a "well (of grief) that owes two buckets" — a bucket plucks water out of the well?) It is Richard who wishes he were a "mockery king of snow" (to be plucked at by the "sun of Bolingbroke", and also by its melting away to mock at and so pluck at the image of the false king. We have already seen how mockery is a close variant of pluck). It is Richard who demands a mirror, to see what a usurped king looks like. (A mirror can be said to pluck at the likeness of those who look into it. But it is also a flatterer, and so again linked to the pluck-syntax, because flattery plucks at a victim through false praise, etc.) Richard smashes the mirror because it flatters him. But he realizes that he, too, is as a deposed king a mirror for magistrates. Finally, Richard converts Bolingbroke's laconic dismissal, "convey him to the Tower" into a final denunciation of the arch-theft, for he stresses the cant meaning of "convey" as "steal, thief": "O good! Convey! Conveyors are you all!"

## 8

What makes the word pluck the most important single word in Shakespeare is the fact that Shakespeare approximates all sins to forms of theft. In his calculus of evil, usurpation is the key concept, and plucking the fruit of the tree of knowledge is the key icon. Shakespeare sees even pride, "vaulting ambition", as assassination which catches at "surcease, success." Unlike Dante, Shakespeare doesn't attempt to formulate his understanding of the nature of evil, but he explores it endlessly by means of the pluck syntax. What is so terrible about evil, in Shakespeare's understanding of it, is the relentless way in which the thief attaches himself to the person stolen from, so that the victim cannot free himself, so to speak from a forced marriage from which there is no divorce. Richard after being deposed begs Bolingbroke to let him go, but is answered by Bolingbroke's command, "convey him to the Tower" — for safe keeping. Soon both parties to this theft of the crown want to be set free from the resulting bondage to each other —

and Exton hearing of Bolingbroke's wish to be rid of Richard murders him. But death doesn't help dissolve this linkage of true king and false king. At the end of the play Bolingbroke is desperately trying to get Richard's blood off his guilty hands. The notion of evil as a bond between thief and victim is one which pervades Shakespeare's work, even in the plays of reconciliation. In *The Tempest*, for example, Prospero is everlastingly bound to Antonio, who has usurped his dukedom. The only way to deal with Antonio's sin, is to forgive it, and love the partnership it enforces; and this is what Prospero does. In the tragedies, the tragic roles concern the inexorable bond between the wrong-doer and the wronged, established by actions which partake of the name of theft.

## 9

The pluck-syntax develops, after *Richard 2*, the results of Richard's murder, a sequence which can be summed up in the ratio

Richard II	=	God's lieutenant//
Henry IV	=	antichrist's lieutenant//
Henry V	=	son and heir to antichrist's lieutenant.

The pluck wordplay is as important in the characterization of Hal/Henry V as in the characterization of Richard II. Adjunct to the above ratio, is Falstaff, who is a travesty-Xenophon, teacher to antichrist's lieutenant's son, and who as thief, coward, disparager of honour and man of guts (guts or bowels are a main meaning of pluck), is rejected by Hal in *2 Henry 4*, that is, the teacher not the pupil-prince is plucked (or failed). The portraits of Richard II and of Hal/Henry V derive in some part from the chronicles. But Falstaff's chief fascination lies in the astounding fact that in his main features and in most of the detail (e.g., he is at long last reported to be at rest in Arthur's bosom, which derives from pluck via breast via heart) this characterization springs out of the genetic wordplay on pluck.

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